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I'm pretty sure it was the great character actor Strother Martin who said those infamous lines in the movie Cool Hand Luke, "What we have here is a failure to communicate."

So true.

First, we have two joint resolutions coming out of the state senate judiciary committee. One is being carried by Lincoln County's Aubyn Curtiss and the other is being carried by Dan Harrington of Butte.

I know the asbestos victims and representatives of the victims, and just about every other asbestos-something in this community, have been talking to Harrington since the first week of the legislative session.

I'm not sure who has been talking to Curtiss. I know two years ago when she successfully got a resolution through both houses seeking a research center in Libby, there was some surprise at the suspicious reaction from the asbestos victims. There was never any communication between the two then and apparently not now. After all, Curtiss' resolution refers to the asbestos victims as "litigants." That's not true. Not everyone diagnosed with ARD is a litigant in a court case.

It appears, Curtiss' resolution was drafted a full month after Harrington's.

If the senator from Fortine feels new hostility from the asbestos victims, it's because she hasn't communicated with them. It's not that people aren't thankful for her efforts, just suspicious of her motivation since there hasn't been direct communication.

Let's take a step up.

U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, who has gone out of his way during the past five years to help Libby with various things related to the asbestos crisis — from cleanup to health care — is coming to town to talk about the research center and health-care issues. A public meeting is scheduled Thursday at 1:30 p.m. in the Libby City Council chambers. There won't be enough space.

Anyway, there hasn't been any communication between Baucus or his staff and the Center for Asbestos Related Disease here in Libby since CARD board members traveled to D.C. to lobby for support. That's about a year ago, if not more.

Then last week, Baucus sent out a news release saying he asked Mike Leavitt, now the secretary of Health and Human Services and formerly the EPA administrator, for funding for research centers in Libby and Missoula.

Say what?

There has been a gargantuan struggle going on behind the scenes between CARD and University of Montana people who are suddenly looking like the proverbial 900-pound gorilla. It appears U of M researchers want everything their way and don't want to play by the rules CARD is setting so that research on Libby's asbestos victims becomes economic development, too, for the community.

If Missoula has its way, Libby will have the victims, who will continue to seek health care for their illness, and Missoula will be a sink hole for the research dollars and related economic development.

To fight a 900-pound gorilla, you have to be united. And it's obvious we're not that when our own state senator isn't talking to asbestos victims.

Hopefully the U.S. senator can enlighten us. —

Roger Morris